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ABSTRACT

Research on second language learning has found similarities between the reading strategies of first and second language readers. These findings are being applied by second language instructors and researchers in reading classrooms through a variety of strategy-use activities. Most foreign language reading specialists view reading as interactive because the reader interacts with the text to create meaning. Both content schemata (background knowledge about the cultural orientation or content of a passage) and formal schemata (reader expectations about how pieces of textual information will relate to each other) influence the reader's comprehension of a passage. The instructor's role is to recognize that all reading strategies will not be equally effective with all students, and to help the reader identify such effective reader strategies as skimming, scanning, guessing word meanings, summarizing, and taking risks. To encourage students to use effective strategies when reading in a second language, the teacher can develop simple exercises at each of the four stages of reading: (1) prereading; (2) while reading; (3) postreading; and (4) follow-up. (VL)

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS

ERIC Digest

Teaching Reading in a Foreign Language

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This *Digest* is based on the ERIC/CLL *Language in Education* series monograph entitled *More Than Meets the Eye. Foreign Language Reading: Theory and Practice*, written by Marva Barnett. The monograph describes research in first language reading and applies the findings of this research to teaching second language reading. It will be available in June 1989 by writing to Prentice Hall Regents, Mail Order Processing, 200 Old Tappan Road, Old Tappan, NJ 07675, or by calling 1-201-767-5937.

Researchers in first language acquisition have contributed much to the understanding of how reading processes develop. First language research has found that readers' purposes and approaches to texts differ not only by text, but by the individual reader. Second language researchers have drawn upon this information and have found similarities between the reading strategies of first and second language readers. Furthermore, second language researchers have learned how expectations defined by a reader's culture influence what the reader understands when reading. Second language researchers and instructors are applying these research findings in classrooms through a variety of strategy-use activities such as those discussed below.

Second Language Reading: An Interactive Process

Most foreign language reading specialists view reading as interactive. The reader interacts with the text to create meaning as the reader's mental processes work together at different levels (Bernhardt, 1986; Carrell, Devine & Eskey, 1988; Rumelhart, 1977).

The level of reader comprehension of the text is determined by how well the reader variables (interest level in the text, purpose for reading the text, knowledge of the topic, foreign language abilities, awareness of the reading process, and level of willingness to take risks) interact with the text variables (text type, structure, syntax, and vocabulary) (Hosenfeld, 1979).

One important part of interactive process theory emphasizes *schemata*, the reader's preexisting concepts about the world and about the text to be read. Into this framework, the reader fits what he or she finds in any passage. If new textual information does not fit into a reader's schemata, the reader misunderstands the new material, ignores the new material, or revises the schemata to match the facts within the passage.

Content schemata are background knowledge about the cultural orientation or content of a passage. For example, readers might know that Mark Twain wrote stories about life on the Mississippi River during the nineteenth century. Such content schemata help the reader to understand and recall more than do readers less familiar with text content (Carrell, Devine & Eskey, 1988).

Formal schemata define reader expectations about how pieces of textual information will relate to each other and in what order details will appear (Carrell, 1987). For example, in a detective story, a reader could expect the following chain of events: A crime occurs, possible suspects are identified, evidence is uncovered, and the perpetrator is apprehended.

Recognizing and Implementing Effective Second Language Reading Strategies

When teachers of second language reading recognize that each reader brings to the reading process a unique set of past experiences, emotional and mental processes, level of cognitive development, and interest level in the topic, they also recognize that not all teaching strategies will be effective for all students. When isolating the most effective teaching strategies to use with a group of students, the second language teacher must also consider those reader strategies that are not necessarily related to content schemata. Such reader strategies include the following:

- using titles and illustrations to understand a passage,
- skimming,
- scanning,
- summarizing,
- guessing word meanings,
- becoming aware of the reading process, and
- taking risks.

All of these strategies can be targeted for use with foreign language materials.

Another step in effectively teaching students how to read materials written in a second language is helping the individual reader to identify effective reading strategies based on text variables. One important part of this step is alerting the readers to significant aspects of text variables that will affect second language reading. For example, pointing out the differences between a fairy tale and a

newspaper article helps the reader to recognize the different text types and to prepare for the uncomplicated sentence structure, high-frequency vocabulary, and, in most cases, happy ending that typically characterize a fairy tale. On the other hand, the same reader would need to prepare very differently to read a newspaper article about the technicalities involved in negotiating a disarmament treaty. In this case, the vocabulary would be very specialized and the sentence structure more complicated.

Incorporating Effective Reading Strategies into the Second Language Classroom

To encourage students to use effective strategies when reading in a second language, the teacher can develop simple exercises to elicit information via targeted strategies. These exercises can be divided by the stage of reading at which they occur.

"Prereading" activities introduce students to a particular text, elicit or provide appropriate background knowledge, and activate necessary schemata. Previewing a text with students should arouse their interest and help them approach the text in a more meaningful and purposeful manner as the discussion compels them to think about the situation or points raised in a text. The prereading phase helps students define selection criteria for the central theme of a story or the major argument of an essay. Prereading activities include: discussing author or text type, brainstorming, reviewing familiar stories (students review *Cinderella* before reading *Cendrillon*), considering illustrations and titles, skimming and scanning (for structure, main points, and future directions).

"While reading" exercises help students develop reading strategies, improve their control of the second language, and decode problematic text passages. Helping students to employ strategies while reading can be difficult because individual students control and need different strategies. Nevertheless, the teacher can pinpoint valuable strategies, explain which strategies individuals most need to practice, and offer concrete exercises in the form of "guided reading" activity sheets. Such practice exercises might include guessing word meanings by using context clues, word formation clues, or cognate practice; considering syntax and sentence structure by noting the grammatical functions of unknown words, analyzing reference words, and predicting text content; reading for specific pieces of information; and learning to use the dictionary effectively.

"Postreading" exercises first check students' comprehension and then lead students to a deeper analysis of the text, when warranted. Because the goals of most real world reading are not to memorize an author's point of view or to summarize text content, but rather to see into another mind, or to mesh new information into what one already knows, second language reading must go beyond detail-eliciting comprehension drills to help students recognize that different strategies are appropriate with different text types. For example, scanning is an appropriate strategy to use with newspaper advertisements whereas predicting and following text cohesion are effective strategies to use with short stories. By discussing in groups what they have understood, students focus on information they did not comprehend, or did not comprehend correctly. Discussions of this nature can lead the student directly to text analysis as class discussion proceeds from determining facts to exploring deeper ramifications of the texts.

"Follow-up" exercises take students beyond the particular reading text in one of two ways: by transferring reading skills to other texts or by integrating reading skills with other language skills (Phillips, 1985).

Transferable reading strategies are those that readers can assimilate and use with other texts. Exercises that emphasize the transfer of skills include beginning a new text similar to a text for which effective strategies have already been taught, i.e., giving students the front page of a newspaper to read after they have learned to read the table of contents of a journal.

Integrative activities use text language and ideas in second language listening, speaking, and/or writing. Integrative skills exercises include such activities as students reacting to texts with summaries, new endings, or pastiches; reenacting text; dramatizing interviews based on the text; carefully listening for key words or phrases in authentic video or audio tapes; and creating role-play situations or simulations of cultural experiences.

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